



Peace and Harmony in Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*

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Abstract: Was becoming independent of British rule enough for this nation? Were all the citizens of India at peace amongst themselves after the end of British colonialism? If not, then were the people actually seeking for harmony at that time able to get what they wanted? What about the condition of India at the present times; has there been any improvement since then? The play *Final Solutions* by Mahesh Dattani attempts to answer all the above-mentioned questions thoroughly and quite meticulously. This research paper not only discusses the main theme of this play, but it also tries to answer an even more important question towards the end: What can be done to take a step towards peace and harmony in this country in the twenty-first century?

Key Words- Peace and harmony, communal riots, communal tension, sexism, generation gap, fundamentalism, gender bias, toxicity in religious practices.

I INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani (1958-present) is an Indian playwright, director, actor, and writer. Arvind Gaur, Alyque Padamsee and Lillete Dubey have been involved in the direction of his plays. He was born in Bangalore to Gujarati parents. He went to Baldwin Boys High School and then St. Joseph's College, Bangalore. India is a diverse country. The cultures and traditions vary from state to state, and thus, it's a bit challenging to talk about the customs of the entire country put together. So, while having a look at Mahesh Dattani and his works, we get to know about the traditions of Gujarat and Karnataka, more specifically, about Bangalore, which is a small fraction of India. He was the first person to receive the Sahitya Academy award for Indian writing in English. Some of his works include- 30 Days in September, Tara, Final Solutions, Where There is a Will, etc.

He chooses topics that are usually never spoken about in society. These topics are always debated in various social situations and are usually seen to be discussed in his plays and exhibited on the stage quite efficiently. The stage has all the technicalities which take the play to a different level. Mahesh likes to play with lights, and this has different connotations attached to it, which, when one reads, finds it difficult to imagine. There is a difference between a written play and one that is performed on stage or in a theater. His choice of make-up and costume designs are always apt to the theme of the particular play that is going to be performed on the stage.

Final Solutions is a play that portrays the religion and gender bias in two different eras and the generation gap that is accompanied. The two eras that are shown are the times when India gained independence only recently and the present day.

The two names Daksha and Hardika are used in this play for the same character to represent the 1940s and the twenty-first century, respectively. The character has two names because her first name was changed to Hardika after her marriage to another character named Hari in the story.

Final Solutions is a three-act play written and directed by Mahesh Dattani. It was first performed at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore, on 10 July 1993. He received the Sahitya Academy award for this play in the year 1998. The main themes of this play are communal riots and sexism in society throughout three generations. The generation gap is also a central theme that is a part of this story. The generation gap is expressed through the ideas of rigid cultural beliefs versus liberalism and secularism in the play.

The term 'communal riots' is defined as conflict between two or more communities owing to conflicts of communal interests. The communal riots in *Final Solutions* take place between Hindus and Muslims in India (and Hussainabad, too, right after the India-Pakistan partition in 1947 post-independence).

Sexism means discrimination on the basis of the 'sex' or 'gender' of a person. In this world, sexism usually takes place against women, and the masculine gender is considered the superior one. In the play, the characters Hardika (or Daksha), Aruna, and Smita have to face sexism from their own family members. Hardika, belonging to the first generation (i.e., from the '40s), undergoes the most amount of agony.

The generation gap is quite evident throughout the three acts of this play. Not only the plight of the minority is expressed in detail, but the pain of the majority is also illustrated quite beautifully. For instance, Hardika's hatred towards the minority group is handled equally sympathetically and with care. The condition of both sides of this whole situation is portrayed impartially.

The play opens with Daksha or Hardika (which is what her name changes to after her marriage; in order to match her husband's name Hari), who is reading out some excerpts from her personal diary. This diary symbolizes her actual thought process, the thoughts that are rid of any filters of tactfulness and suppression. This diary is not just an object but a valuable part of her life, and she refers to her diary as her best friend. All those thoughts that she is not free to express openly are stored within the pages of her diary.

Daksha is a young girl who is married off to a man by her family at the tender age of fifteen. From the way she describes her husband and in-laws in her diary, it seems as though she does not have a very high opinion of them. This means she clearly has some resentment towards her family on a subconscious level for marrying her off so early. The way she is treated by her in-laws and husband consists of sexist undertones. She is denied access to trivial things like using her father-in-law's fountain pen, listening to her favourite singer Noor Jehan's songs on the gramophone, etc.

DAKSHA. All my dreams have been shattered... I can never be a singer, like Noor Jehan Hari's family is against my singing film songs. (Dattani, 166)

In order to fulfill her wish to listen to Noor Jehan's songs, she has to visit a girl named Zarine in the neighbourhood. She had befriended Zarine a short while after she had moved into her in-laws' place post-wedding. She visits her house every now and then in stealth because she is not otherwise allowed by her family to visit a Muslim's place. The key point to be noticed here is that not everyone used to be prejudiced, even the older generation. Bigotry is often imposed upon by the society. She even becomes a victim of domestic violence due to all this.

However, things change after a tragic incident in her life. During the time of partition, when her family was trying to flee from Hussainabad, her father had been killed by some Muslims on the street. She has developed a profound hatred towards the whole Muslim community ever since. She had developed some resentment towards Zarine and her family even before this tragic incident because she thought that they were not accepting the job offered by her father-in-law out of a sense of false pride.

At the beginning of her monologue, she talks about Indian independence as a 'terrible' thing; for terrible it was indeed, at least for her personally. She is mainly ruminating about the India-Pakistan partition that happened right after the declaration of independence.

During those trying times, she even questions her own faith in God as she looks at Krishna's idol in a new light for the first time. When her gramophone is broken by the attackers outside of their house, she blames herself for that and believes that it is God's way of punishing her for doubting in Him. The theme of reasoning and asking questions about religious beliefs is introduced instead of blindly following everything that is being spoon-fed by the elders in the family.

The next character we meet is Hardika's granddaughter, Smita. She is a girl who believes in liberal ideology. Smita helps her mother, Aruna, in her pooja works out of love, but she does not believe in the fundamentalism forced on her by her mother. At one point in time, Smita even gets tired of her prejudices and goes through a severe breakdown.

The sexism in her generation is present, but it is somewhat mild compared to Hardika's generation. Her mother threatens to prohibit her from leaving her home when she recognizes the boys who visit her home in need of protection.

ARUNA. Stop her studies! From now on, she can stay at home! (Dattani, 188)

Smita is decidedly much more open and bold when she spends some time with her friends, and she becomes mousey whenever her parents are around.

Ramnik Gandhi, son of Hardika, is a liberal-minded man who does not support communal hatred. He is quite an intriguing character who comes with some mixed traits of his own.

His good trait is that he actually helps the two men who are in need of protection from themob. He does not tolerate the injustice towards the refugees, even from his own wife and mother. He does not want those refugees to be apologetic over trivial things. He encourages his family to be sympathetic towards them, and the other people in society like them as well. He hates it when his mother keeps ruminating about her past in front of Smita, always portraying Muslims in a badlight in her stories.

Some of his flaws need to be discussed too. He is quick to develop a superiority complex over many things. He tries to help one of the refugees named Javed by offering a job- he surely does that because he really wants to help him, but he also has a bit of a god complex while he is at it. In actuality, he wants to atone for the sin committed by his father and grandfather in the past. Speaking of which, his other flaw is that he conceals an important piece of information from her mother for forty years, thinking that this would make her suffer even more, as though he is the one who should be making decisions on everyone's behalf. The information is that Zarine's family did not refuse to join hands with Hardika's family in the '40s out of false pride. Her husband was responsible for burning down Zarine's father's sweet shop back then. At the end of the last act of this play, Hardika is left feeling guilty about her hatred for the entire Muslim community throughout a huge part of her life. Indirectly, Ramnik is also responsible for this. Ramnik keeps asking her to stop hating the whole community because of the crimes committed by a few, but he does not give her the real reason behind that. At one point, Ramnik himself admits that if Smita had started to oppose Aruna's prejudiced beliefs a long time ago, he would have felt triumphant against his wife.

Aruna, the wife of Ramnik Gandhi, is a typical Indian housewife who is a God-fearing person. She has spent her whole life on the *pooja path*, and she does not like to compromise with anything that is related to her God. She strongly dislikes the decision of her husband, the decision of allowing the Muslim boys to stay with them under the same roof. Aruna did have sympathy for the two boys, but at the same time, she was scared of them too.

Bobby, whose original name is Babban, is one of the refugees that have been mentioned before. Though he is also a Muslim like Javed, he is not interested in showing that off to the world. That is the reason he changes his name from Babban to Bobby when he goes to college. He is about to get married to Javed's sister Tasneem, who happens to be a good friend of Smita as well. Bobby has control over his temper and is quite tactful in social situations most of the time. He is good at communication skills. He is the one to save Javed from the Ratha Yatra procession and take refuge in the house of Ramnik Gandhi. Bobby usually tries to seek harmony.

In Act III, Bobby makes Aruna, the wife of Ramnik, understand that God doesn't differentiate between people. To Him, all are equal. This is evident from the following quote-

BOBBY. You can bathe Him day and night, you can splash holy waters on Him but you cannot remove my touch from His form. You cannot remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. This is the strongest fragrance in the world! (Dattani, 224, 225)

Bobby also believes in believing one another. He feels and says that if people believe in one another, then nothing can be destroyed.

Javed is the other Muslim refugee in the play. He is a young, baffled boy who becomes a victim and a terrorist. The politicians exploit him in the name of Jihad, the Holy War. Javed pursues training for terrorist activities. He goes, or rather he is sent, to a street where the Hindus live. The Ratha Yatra procession comes onto the street, and there are many people join in the procession. He throws a stone at first to the procession to create chaos. He is supposed to kill the pujari or the priest of the Ratha Yatra. Javed moves towards the pujari with a knife in his hand and gets mingled in the crowd. Though Javed has the responsibility to kill the pujari, he is unable to do so, eventually. The knife falls down from his hand, and he feels nauseated and wonders what he is doing in the procession. He questions whether he is even in his right mind or not. This state of his mind clearly shows that, though he is a terrorist, he has the heart of a human being. Javed is not the actual murderer of the pujari; in fact, the knife had fallen down from his hand, and he clearly saw that someone else had picked it up and killed the priest. He becomes the victim of his fate.

Javed talks about the police department that never arrests the people who are actually guilty. He says that the police always harass innocent and common people, and that is the reason the victims lose their faith in this department. Mahesh Dattani, through the character Javed, brings forth the true nature of the police department along with the themes of communalism.

JAVED. Arrest me? When they have been looking the other way all along. How do you think we got into the street? In their vans. They will arrest me. Don't worry. To please people like you. And a few innocent Muslims to please everyone. (Dattani, 204)

This play blends the themes of communalism and sexism in a way that they start feeling integrated at one point. There is a dire need for peace and harmony whenever communal riots take place in a particular area. The two things can be achieved only when the individual people from both communities break themselves off from their own mental fundamentalist shackles, are willing to join hands, and treat each other as human beings first. Taking a bath right after coming into a Muslim person's contact is downright stupid. Such practices should be condemned and looked down upon. When a few people start this, it becomes relatively easier to spread the liberalistic ideology across the communities.

However, it feels incomplete to not discuss peace and harmony with respect to the sexist undertones. Women make up almost half of the human race. To deprive them of education and basic freedom and to order them to stay inside the confined spaces of their homes is counter-productive in the long run. Why is Daksha not allowed to do the most basic things like listening to her favourite music or getting an education? Why is Hardika not completely informed about Zarine's father's situation by Ramnik until it was too late? Why does Ramnik not communicate about his ideology with Aruna properly? Why does Smita feel the need to defend herself just because she has recognized Javed and Bobby?

The key thing here is the ability to ask questions and to not keep quiet until some reasonable answers have been provided. Women need to stand up for each other more. Men need to stop trivializing crucial problems like these. If the feminine gender keeps going backwards in the future and becomes stagnated, the whole human race will witness nothing but a massive downfall and destruction.

The methodology of the research paper would be through reading the above-mentioned play, feeling the essence of it, and trying to relate to it and empathize with it in order to understand the author better. The analytical method will be used to perform this research. For this, the play *Final Solutions* written by Mahesh Dattani will be used as the primary source, and the secondary source will be the critical analysis by various authors.

The crux of the matter is whenever there is a situation of communal riots, both the communities involved are equally at fault. Someone needs to take a stand against this to put an end to communalist tension once and for all. Only a few people standing up to stop this will not be enough, but it would at least be a start. More people will automatically start getting drifted towards the liberalistic and peaceful mindset.

Education is the key. Education should be easily available and free for all. Academic education and value education being provided to the masses can prove to be helpful in many ways. If people remain inadequately educated, they will get hung up in their own fundamentalist conditioning and severely rigid mindset. They would only prove to be a liability and hindrance in the process of human resource development in India. People getting caught up in social evils and toxic religious practices are not being productive in their daily routines. Their conditioning is not only harmful to themselves in the long run, but it also proves to be harmful to the other people around them. One of the most effective ways to get rid of this type of mentality is education. Other methods include broadcasting social advertisements through different forms of media, performing street plays in the localities, spreading peace amongst loved ones instead of hate speech, etc.

It is crucial to be completely informed on both of the perspectives with respect to communalist tension.

Access to education means it should be available for all without any kind of discrimination. This means women should not be excluded from education, along with other basic facilities that are easily accessible to men. Only then people like Aruna and Hardika will be able to live a life where they are not so narrow-minded but genuinely kind to everyone without any hidden agenda.

The two goals in this story, i.e., to gain peace between Hindus and Muslims and to stop depriving women of basic needs by eliminating the patriarchal mindset, go hand in hand. The two elements almost feel like two sides of the same coin. It would be extremely difficult to achieve peace and harmony in society if either of these two aspects were ignored.

Mahesh Dattani is a playwright of recent times. He has accommodated the communal bias and gender bias across three generations in his story.

While these two social evils are still prevalent in the nation today, the situation is certainly milder as compared to older generations.

Mahesh Dattani is a playwright who always sticks to the realism of Indian society in his plays, and *Final Solutions* is no exception to that. All the characters are well-developed, and every character's background feels equally compelling to the reader. These are realistic characters going through realistic situations and problems.

So, coming back to the questions asked before.

Was becoming independent of British rule enough for this nation?

At this point, it is clear that the answer is no. When the Britishers left, the whole unit (i.e., India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in the present day) was not even a whole country. They were all just small, independent kingdoms with zero unity and sense of security amongst those said kingdoms. Hindus were promoting bias and bigotry amongst themselves, too, on the basis of different castes. The riots going on between Hindus and Muslims were on a whole different level. Mahesh Dattani uses irony in the play. The setting of the play, particularly at the beginning of the first act, is during the time when India received its independence. Daksha got married to Hari in that period, exactly. Dattani has tried to show here in this story that, on the one hand, independence or freedom has been achieved by India, but on the other hand, Daksha loses her freedom. So, obviously, India being free of British rule was not enough for it to become a progressive nation.

Were the citizens of India at peace amongst themselves after the end of British colonialism?

The citizens of India were definitely not at peace amongst themselves after the end of British colonial rule. The mob/chorus in this play represents the terrorism and thorough intolerance which existed at that time (and still does in the current times).

Were the people actually looking for peace and harmony able to get what they wanted?

The answer is a bit complicated. To some extent, yes. There are people like Smita and Bobby who just want to live and let others live. There are people like Ramnik who take some stand against intolerance towards the minority and openly dislike conservative mindsets like that of Aruna and Hardika. However, people like Daksha, who actually wanted to befriend people from the Muslim community, were not able to do so, either because of outright condemnation or because of a lack of information about the full situation related to Muslims (Zarine's father's sweet shop comes to mind). After her father's murder by a few Muslims, she becomes hateful to the entire community due to her upbringing and lack of education. So, the bottom line here is that not everyone seeking tolerance was able to get it. Some people had to go through a lot more hardships as compared to others.

Has there been any improvement in the present times?

To some extent, yes. This can be seen through the character Smita, who is young and open-minded in the present times. She has a Muslim friend in college, Tasneem, because of whom she is able to recognize the refugees immediately. Smita is also implied to have had a relationship with Bobby at one point in the past. She generally tries to be more inclusive of others. For instance, she asks Javed to fill that pot of water which is used for the pooja path in her home daily, in order to prove a point.

Some improvement can be seen in the second generation or Ramnik's generation as well. He is the one who gives refuge to Bobby and Javed, offers a job to Javed, shows his open resentment towards Aruna for not treating the two men properly, and does not like it whenever his mother Hardika narrates stories from her own times to Smita because she always portrays the Muslims in the bad light whenever she is at it.

However, this does not mean communal riots and terrorism have ended in this world for good. Javed is a young man belonging to the third generation, but he has some strong opinions on protecting his community and people. He has been strongly brainwashed by the politicians to actually support Jihad, to the point when he even becomes ready to murder a Hindu priest with a knife. This mentality still exists, and religious wars are still really violent and filled with bloodshed even now. It's just that the people in regular, day-to-day life have begun to grow more tolerant towards each other in the present times. People who have a mindset like Aruna's are gradually decreasing in number. Even if they exist and openly express their resentment towards the other communities, they started to be frowned upon nowadays, and that is a good change.

So, what can be done to take a step towards peace and harmony in the twenty-first century?

One way could be by thinking of the people around us as human beings first. What is a person if their religious identity has been stripped from them? They are still a human. Now, it is not intended here to stop all the religious practices all of a sudden. That would be impossible. Being religious is one thing; being a fundamentalist is completely different. It has been clarified here that only the latter is undesirable. The rigidity, the toxic religious practices, and the social evils that are associated with them are the things that should be looked down upon. These elements do nothing but increase intolerance in society.

Another aspect of it in the context of this play is sexism. Depriving women of basic needs, feeling a sense of power over them, concealing information from them as manipulation tactics, etc., would not lead anyone anywhere. Men need to take a stand against the misogyny that happens in various public places on women's behalf. Women are their equals, not their slaves. Various programs should be organized at schools, colleges, etc., to assert ideas about female positivity. The sooner the internalized misogyny is crushed, the better. A small step towards peace and harmony would be worth a thousand hardships that are associated with making reforms.

Live and let live.

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